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Julia M. Wallis
Kansas State University, wallisj@ksu.edu

Joy M. Kozar
Kansas State University, jkozar@ksu.edu

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The Effects of Social Media on the Body Satisfaction of Adolescent and Young Adult Females

Julia M. Wallis and Joy M. Kozar, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS

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This study examined how social media impacts the body satisfaction of adolescent and young adult females through the variables of age, time spent on social media, social comparison behaviors, and appearance-related attitudes. The study utilized a sample of females between the ages of 14 to 25 with varying educational backgrounds. This study contributes to increased knowledge about the effects of social media on the body satisfaction of young women which can impact self-esteem, self-perceptions, and overall mental and physical health. As a component of this study, age was broken into two groups, thereby creating a younger (14-18) and older (19-25) group. This allowed the researchers to also make comparisons between the two age groups on variables related to time spent on social media and body satisfaction.

An online questionnaire was utilized as part of this study. The questionnaire was distributed to college professors, high school instructors, high school and college-age students, and via social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Utilizing a snowball sampling approach, it was requested that the link be shared with anyone who fit the parameters of the target population (female; between the ages of 14-25). The questionnaire included the Body Areas Satisfaction Scale (Cash & Henry, 1995), used to measure each participant's overall and specific areas of body satisfaction, the Social Comparison Behavior Scale (Jones, 2001), used to measure each participant's tendency to compare certain physical attributes to others including two specific groups, fashion models and celebrities, and peers, and finally, the Sociocultural Attitudes towards Appearance Scale (Heinberg, Heinberg, Thompson & Stormer, 1995), used to measure women's acceptance of their appearance. Each scale included multiple items that were combined in order to create summed mean scores for a total of four summed variables. Each scale was tested to ensure reliability through Cronbach's *alpha*. Demographic questions and questions pertaining to participants' use of social media were also included in the questionnaire.

A total of 357 female respondents between the ages of 14 and 25 years old participated in the study. Of the 357 participants, 140 (39.2%) were in the age category of 14-18 and 217 (60.8%) were in the age category of 19-25. The mean age of participants was 19 years.

Simple linear regression analysis was used to examine relationships among the summed variables. Independent sample *t*-tests were used to examine differences in scores among the two age groups. Among the findings, a significant relationship existed between the number of times participants accessed their social media accounts daily and their overall social comparison behavior to fashion models and celebrities ($F = 4.12, p < .01$) and peers ($F = 2.39, p < .05$). In other words, those participants who accessed their social media accounts more times per day were also more likely to engage in social comparison behavior to fashion models and celebrities and peers. A significant inverse relationship also existed between social comparison to peers and

body satisfaction ($t = -6.23, p < .0001$) and appearance-related attitudes and body satisfaction ($t = -11.60, p < .0001$). Meaning, the more participants compared themselves with peers and the higher their appearance-related attitudes, the lower their body satisfaction. Independent sample t -tests revealed that age was not a significant factor in predicting time spent on social media, participation in social comparison behavior, or appearance-related attitudes. However, age was significant in determining body satisfaction ($t = 2.20, p < .05$). Among the two age groups, younger participants ($M = 3.45$) were overall more satisfied with their body than older participants ($M = 3.26$). Participants in general reported satisfaction with their hair ($M = 4.11$), height ($M = 3.88$), and facial features ($M = 3.83$), while expressing dissatisfaction with their weight ($M = 2.86$) and mid-torso ($M = 2.69$). Additionally, participants only sometimes compared themselves to fashion models and celebrities ($M = 3.06$) and peers ($M = 3.05$), mostly comparing overall attractiveness and style to both groups. Although age was not found to be a significant predictor of social comparison behavior, it was noted that the younger participants held slightly lower mean scores regarding their tendency to engage in social comparison behavior (Younger $M = 3.03$, Older $M = 3.07$). Participants overall also felt rather neutral in regards to their appearance-related attitudes regardless of age (Younger $M = 3.30$, Older $M = 3.31$). However, among the individual items of the SATAQ scale, participants reported the most pressure from social media to look pretty ($M = 3.66$), to exercise ($M = 3.49$), and to have a perfect body ($M = 3.47$).

Finally, it was determined that on average, participants checked their social media accounts between 10 and 15 times a day and spent approximately two to three hours daily on their social media accounts. The “like” option feature on most social media websites was also important to many participants with 49% indicating they felt dissatisfied if they did not receive the number of “likes” they wished. Overall, participants indicated wanting between 30-40 “likes” in order to feel good about an uploaded picture.

These findings have important implications for the fashion and cosmetics industries and AT educators. The results indicate that social media has an impact on young women’s body satisfaction and acceptance. It also shows the magnitude of social media usage among women in the 14-25 age group. As such, social media can be used in marketing positive messages that emphasize body acceptance among young women.

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